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Project background

The Regional Rail Project

The NSW Government is replacing the ageing NSW regional rail fleet of XPT, XPLOER and Endeavour trains. The new trains will improve safety, accessibility, amenities and reliability for customers. As part of the Project, a new train maintenance facility will be built in Dubbo to stimulate the regional economy and help create sustainable job opportunities and develop skills.

Further information on the Regional Rail Project can be found [here](#).

The JSIP Strategy

Transport for NSW's Regional Rail Project (RRP) has developed a Jobs, Skills and Industry Participation (JSIP) Strategy to maximise job creation, skills development and business opportunities in regional NSW (refer **Figure 1**).



Figure 1: Regional Rail JSIP objectives and key priorities

The Business Program

In addressing the third objective of *Opportunities for regional NSW* businesses including Australian and New Zealand Small to Medium Enterprises (ANZ SMEs) and Recognised Aboriginal Businesses, the RRP has developed a Business Program that includes:

- Industry briefings;
- **Tender writing workshops**; and
- A Business Support Catalogue to help businesses in and around the Central West and Orana region to further develop their skills and capabilities. The Business Support Catalogue provides information on programs, grants and general support for businesses, such as accessing funding to expand their operations, or developing their employees' skills.

The Business Program is being developed and implemented with the support of other agencies and local stakeholders through the RRP Jobs, Skills & Industry Participation Advisory Group and Aboriginal Working Group, and is included in the RRP contract with [Momentum Trains](#).

This case study provides information and lessons learned on the **tender writing workshops**.

Project objectives

The need for tender writing support was confirmed at the first Industry Briefing and Networking event organised by the RRP in April 2018, during the request for proposal phase of the Project. On this occasion, the RRP team asked participating businesses to express their needs in terms of support. 'Responding to tenders' came up as a top priority (refer **Figure 2**), which triggered the exploration of tender writing workshops.

Question 6 – In which areas would you like to get support?

Survey Responses

- * Other comments:
- All Australia Mid-tier self
 - Superannuation services for staff offices in Sydney, Melbourne, QLD, SA, WA and Dubbo
 - Training/employment for Aboriginal Businesses
 - Finding opportunities early in the process
 - Creating Regional Employment

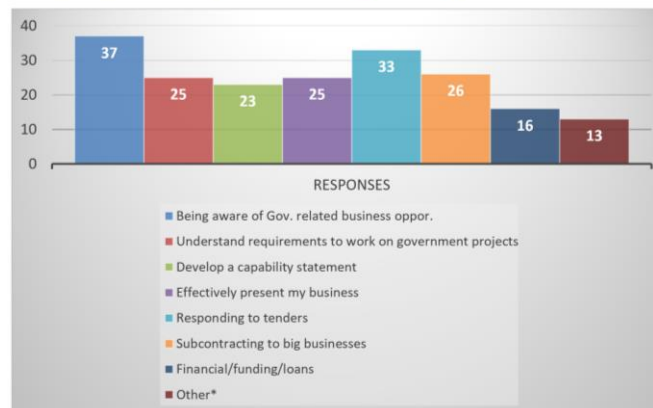


Figure 2: Extract from Industry Briefing and Networking event participants' survey

The aim of the tender writing workshops was to help businesses from Regional NSW and Recognised Aboriginal Businesses (with a focus on Dubbo and surrounds) better position themselves to compete for opportunities on the RRP, through increasing capability to respond to invitation to tenders through:

- **'Positioning for success'**: building customers' confidence in their businesses, finding their business' unique value proposition and developing capabilities to meet customers' needs.
- **'Planning for success'**: setting up process and teams to develop the proposal.
- **'Persuading for success'**: drafting different sections of the proposal, using persuasive techniques to impress customers, achieving customer focus.

Two tender writing workshops were held by the RRP in Dubbo, one in May 2019 and one in September 2019. Expressions of Interests (EOIs) were released by CPB Contractors (the construction contractor partner of Momentum Trains) in October 2019. The timing of the training provided an opportunity for businesses to spend time upskilling and become better prepared for the EOI and invitation to tender processes which started in October 2019

Project implementation

Roles and responsibilities

The implementation of the tender writing workshops involved several key stakeholders:

- **Funding:** The first session (May 2019) was 100 per cent funded by the previous Department of Industry (now Department of Planning, Industry and Environment) (DPIE) Business Connect program. The second session was 100 per cent funded by Transport for NSW.
- **Project administration:** Transport for NSW (TfNSW) managed the project including stakeholder engagement and coordination, selection of the service provider, registrations and the catering service provider. Invites were sent through the Eventbrite platform, which managed RSVPs.
- **Venue:** Dubbo Regional Council provided venues for both workshops.
- **Identifying businesses:** This was a team effort, involving TfNSW, local councils, Department of Regional NSW, DPIE and members of the RRP Aboriginal Working Group.
- **Event promotion:** Promotion of the event consisted of direct engagement with targeted businesses on the invite list via phone and email, with support from local partners including the Department of Regional NSW, Dubbo Regional Council, Narromine Shire Council and Gilgandra Shire Council. Bidwrite (see below) assisted in drafting promotional material.
- **Training delivery:** This was outsourced to the consultant Bidwrite including training design, development, delivery and feedback report.

Focus on service provider selection

The content developer/facilitator was engaged externally for expertise in training on tendering. TfNSW went to market, approaching three businesses. Two responses were received from Tender Search and Bidwrite was selected. Bidwrite is a Perth based business (with a national scope) advising and training small businesses – including in regional areas – to respond to tenders.

Focus on the target audience

The selection of businesses to attend the tender writing workshops focussed on businesses in and around Dubbo, and Recognised Aboriginal Businesses. Businesses were targeted to help facilitate the capability building of businesses that would meet the requirements of the RRP's construction and maintenance phases, as well as fulfilling the RRP's JSIP contract requirements. A list of invitees was obtained from the Project's Business Database compiled using industry briefing attendee lists, desktop research, and lists and contacts provided by the advisory groups' members. The products and services offered by these businesses was analysed to ensure they were a good fit and would have direct interest in the tender writing workshops.

Focus on the training model

The initial workshop held in May was structured as two full one-day sessions, consisting of one day of training and one day for tailored coaching sessions for businesses. Based on participant feedback around the difficulty to commit for two days, the second workshop was held over one day from 8.30am - 4.30pm and included a session for reviewing proposals, but no one-on-one sessions.

The Procurement Manager from CPB Contractors attended both workshops and delivered training specific to their tendering requirements and was available to answer questions. The Procurement Manager was also available to share initial timelines for the Regional Rail Maintenance Facility invitation to tender packages, which was welcomed by the participants.

RRP representatives also attended the workshop and provided insights on topics such as the project background, the JSIP Strategy and existing funding programs.



Figure 3: Workshop number 2, facilitated by David Lunn from BidWrite



Figure 4: Procurement Manager from CPB delivering training

Project outcomes

Level of attendance

For the initial workshop, 21 people registered, however only seven attended on the day, despite the RRP team calling all participants two weeks before the event and sending a reminder email one week before. Reasons provided included illness or family issues, and being too busy with work. Other potential explanations could be lack of near-term tangible opportunities, lots of work at present, or low perceived value of 'free' government training.

For the second workshop, 30 people registered and 26 attended on the day. To maximise attendance in the second workshop, the Department of Regional NSW and local councils were involved in promoting the event. They also assisted in following up with invitees that had registered by phoning two weeks before and two days before the date, and asking those registered to release their seats if they could no longer attend as spots were limited.

Participants' satisfaction

The feedback from attendees was considered positive, with a score of 4.8 out of 5 received for the first training and 4.6 out of 5 for the second training. Feedback included:

- *"Very informative, learnt heaps".*
- *"Interaction with participants".*
- *"It broadened my knowledge on a subject that will be beneficial in the future".*

- *“Impressed by the level of detail the trainer went through with us”.*
- *“Having a representative from CPB was a valuable approach”.*
- *“Great to have the client in the room”.*
- *“A dry topic was made entertaining”.*
- *“Instructor was engaging & highly informative”.*
- *“I enjoyed all of the small tips”.*

See also below (**Figure 5**) a social media post from one of the training participants.

The only perceived negative was that some attendees seemed to have planned to attend for only part of the day, with around half leaving before the training finished. Formal feedback was not received from those who left early.



Figure 5: Positive feedback promoted on Facebook by an attendee from GM Rail Services

Benefits

Benefits to participating businesses

The benefits of this training are expected to be realised over the coming months and years through the procurement phases for the construction of the Regional Rail Maintenance Facility, train completion works and train maintenance. The impact is expected to reach beyond the RRP, as attendees can utilise the training when tendering for other projects.

As of July 2020, three businesses that attended one or both tender writing workshops have been engaged by CPB for site establishment activities and also the first major contract for earthworks activities (Dubbo-based business MAAS Civil Pty Ltd).

Dominic Wilson, General Manager for MAAS Civil Pty Ltd provided the following testimonial:

“MAAS (myself and our Project Engineer) attended the Regional Rail Tender Writing Workshop on 12 September 2019, in Dubbo. The workshop provided a very informative, step by step process on how to prepare for a tender before submitting. Although MAAS has a track record of successfully contracting to major projects, the workshop provided a good reminder of how to manage the tendering process. We felt it was particularly useful for smaller businesses in the room on how to interpret requirements. NSW Government should consider this type of business support for other major projects, particularly to support smaller businesses in the tendering process”.

A further example of clear and tangible benefits of the tender writing workshops is the feedback from local Dubbo resident and business owner, Jenny Murphy (Termi Home & Commercial), who attended both the first and second tender writing workshops and has remarked *“I have been telling other businesses and everyone I speak to about how good the workshops were. Just fantastic”.*

After the first workshop, Jenny felt confident enough to apply the skills she had learned to an award submission, ‘National Pest Manager of the Year’. Using the learnings and ideas from the workshop, Jenny’s application was successful in moving to the second round of the competition.

Broader benefits

The tender writing workshops have likely supported the following broader benefits:

- Increasing knowledge of Regional NSW business and Recognised Aboriginal Business support needs within TfNSW, advisory group partners and broader NSW Government.
- Regional economic development through business capability building.
- Increasing the range and number of Regional NSW suppliers to support infrastructure demand.
- A workshop model that could be replicated on other infrastructure projects.

Project key lessons learned

Lesson learned number 1 – Collaborating with local stakeholders

The key success factor for delivery of the second workshop was making use of strong relationships held with government locally; including Department of Regional NSW, Dubbo Regional Council, Gilgandra Shire Council and Narromine Shire Council. The low attendance in the first session was discussed with key stakeholders, who then volunteered to assist in engagement for the second session. Their local knowledge of, and relationships with businesses was fundamental to identifying relevant businesses, and to ensuring businesses understood the value of the workshop and ultimately attend on the day. Also of note is that Gilgandra Shire Council recommended the tender writing workshop model and provider Bidwrite to TfNSW.

Lesson learned number 2 – Adapting training duration to small business needs

A key issue encountered was businesses committing to taking time from their work schedules to attend, this was better managed for the second session. The initial two-day workshop was found to be too long and attendance was low. For the second workshop the approach was adapted. A one-day session was more practicable. Marketing material for the second session included more detailed information about the event and testimonials from past participants. The shorter length of the second session did not allow for targeted one-on-one knowledge sharing, and a piece of negative feedback reflected this. A solution proposed by Bidwrite is to offer follow-on evening or early morning sessions that target specific RRP topics through 'bite sized chunks'. This would allow businesses to take part in a wider learning program that builds on topics introduced during the workshop.

Lesson learned number 3 – Avoid complex funding models

A lesson that emerged from exploring a co-funding model with the Department of Industry for the first workshop was that the process can be lengthy, with the requirement of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government agencies. This led to the decision that each workshop would be funded by one agency, rather than two agencies co-funding both workshops. For a relatively small cost initiative, it is recommended that funding come from one agency where possible.

Lesson learned number 4 – Trust the training expert

A further learning is to trust the trainer and their advice. While the specialist tender writing trainer was engaged to facilitate the sessions, their professional advice regarding promotion, marketing, registrations and fees were also key to the success of (particularly the second) workshops.

Next steps

The RRP is developing and implementing the next stages of the Business Program, this may include additional workshops and training that is targeted at the upcoming, invitation to tender opportunities, for both the construction of the new Regional Rail Maintenance Facility and the maintenance phase of the RRP.

The RRP is interacting with other Government Agencies to share lessons learned and explore further collaboration. The RRP will continue to explore the tangible and practical outcomes for businesses that participated in the tender writing workshops.

Contact details

For further information on this RRP Regional Development Case Study, please contact the Regional Rail Project's Regional Development team at JSIP@transport.nsw.gov.au